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SUBJECT: GEORGIA/ABKHAZIA: BERLIN FRIENDS MTG - JAN 22

Classified By: DAS Matthew Bryza for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY. DAS Matthew Bryza attended a January 22 meeting in Berlin of the UN Friends of the Secretary General for Georgia (FSG or Friends) hosted by the German MFA. The Friends finalized a list of substantive confidence-building measures to be discussed with the sides at Geneva on February 12-13. They agreed to try to depoliticize and streamline the UNOMIG mandate renewal process, perhaps by convening additional meetings for substantive discussions to take place well in advance of mandate renewal negotiations. Bryza said the U.S. would consider a visa for Abkhaz separatist "foreign minister" Shamba to appear in New York, provided Shamba came to report on substantive progress in negotiations and assuming prior agreement on a streamlined UNOMIG mandate renewal. Notably, the Friends agreed on Georgia's right in principle to administer to its citizens in the Upper Kodori Gorge and its obligation to provide appropriate security not only for its citizens, but for CIS peacekeepers and UNOMIG observers, as well. END SUMMARY

12. (C) In addition to Bryza, the FSG were represented by: Sir Brian Fall (UK), Veronique Bujon-Barre (France), Hans-Dieter Lucas (Germany), and Vladislav Chernov (Russian Federation). Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) for Abkhazia Jean Arnault also

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attended. Assisting were EUR/CARC Conflicts Advisor John Crosby (U.S.), Louise Savill (UK), Aurelia Bouchez (France), Christoph Retzlaff and Mirko Schilbach (Germany), and a notetaker from the Russian Embassy in Berlin.

13. (C) RECENT DEVELOPMENTS. SRSG Jean Arnault started the meeting by recapping recent developments in Georgia's Abkhazia region. He highlighted the resumption of joint UNOMIG/JPKF patrols of the Upper Kodori Valley (UKV); noted progress on ensuring Georgian access to the UKV without presenting a threat to the Abkhaz; said he would ask the UN to increase the international police contingent within UNOMIG to full complement; and pointed to arrangements by which a UNOMIG Human Rights Officer would be present whenever human rights issues are raised in the Gali district, despite refusal of the Abkhaz to allow a UN Human Rights sub-office there. Nonetheless, Arnault said

tensions remain high. As Abkhaz elections approach, he said, "president" Sergei Bagapsh has staked his re-election campaign in part on evicting the Georgian "Government in Exile" from the UKV; Kosovo final status talks are weighing on the sides; and fears that ongoing disagreements may lead to violence are widespread. Arnault said his main priority is to "restore the fabric of relations between the sides."

14. (C) BREAKING THE STALEMATE. Bryza thanked Arnault for a clear and carefully-drafted UNOMIG report and asked for Arnault's thoughts on breaking the stalemate in the Georgian-Abkhaz political dialogue. Arnault said the upcoming Geneva Friends meeting on February 12-13 might help move the sides on the issue of the format for their meetings. He said two mechanisms exist for the sides to discuss security issues: the quadripartite meeting (QPM) and ad hoc meetings, as begun in January 2006 when Abkhaz "foreign minister" Sergei Shamba met Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Merab Antadze. Arnault said Georgia had failed to appoint a QPM coordinator, so the QPMs had ceased. Shamba, on the other hand, refused to meet again in the ad hoc format.

15. (C) RUSSIA: ABKHAZ FEARS ARE JUSTIFIED. Chernov also thanked Arnault for his report, noting it provided a tool for working with the sides to revitalize the Coordination Council and Sochi Working Groups. Chernov said form was more important than substance in moving forward the conflict resolution process. Nevertheless, he supported a bilateral meeting at the highest level to discuss an agreement on non-use of force between the sides. Chernov said the Georgian "Government in Exile" antagonized the Abkhaz and contributed to continuing deadlock. He said Russia's concern about the situation in the UKV centered on military security: pointing to "500 (Georgian) military personnel dressed in MOIA uniforms" and the likelihood that Georgian President Saakashvili's plan to build summer camps in the UKV was actually a plan to build gathering places for reserve forces, Chernov said the Abkhaz were justified in fearing Georgian intentions to use the UKV as a launching site for an attack on Abkhazia.

16. (C) NON-USE OF FORCE PLEDGE. Calling for greater transparency and confidence-building in the UKV, Fall supported the need for a Georgian non-use of force pledge but said there were ways to build confidence even without such a pledge by Georgia. Fall said it was important for all five Friends to tell the Government of Georgia (GoG) that they supported Georgia's right to ensure law and order and provide local services in the UKV. The French delegation agreed it was important to focus on confidence-building measures (CBMs) and stress to the sides that Kosovo would not be a precedent for Abkhazia. Chernov volunteered that regular phone calls between Georgian and Abkhaz leaders in the Coordination Council format were an effective mechanism for building confidence; Arnault contradicted him, saying phone diplomacy was not working. Bryza praised Chernov's suggestion, noting that it was easier to use existing formats; in any case, he said something must be done. Bryza said a non-use of force pledge by Georgia would be a good step forward but asked what Saakashvili could expect in return.

17. (C) THE "KOSOVO EFFECT." Arnault reiterated the need for the FSG to work with the sides to overcome objections to existing mechanisms. On Kosovo, he said the GoG felt compelled to create dual power situations in Abkhazia and South Ossetia specifically because of the threat of a Kosovo precedent. Arnault said the GoG needed reassurances that they had nothing to fear, regardless of how Kosovo was resolved. In that case, he predicted the GoG would "give up on the Government-in-Exile" which would, in turn, help Bagapsh agree to direct talks with Saakashvili.

18. (C) RUSSIA: NO RECOGNITION IF NO MORE HOSTILITIES.

Chernov said a Georgian non-use of force pledge was not enough to satisfy Russia and the Abkhaz that Georgia did not intend to move deeper into Abkhazia from its UKV base. He said the Russian Federation had been "restrained with the Abkhaz" regarding independence and that Russia preferred agreed multilateral approaches to resolve the conflict. Chernov said, "this will be our position, provided there is no resumption of hostilities." He underscored that military action by Georgia would affect Russian security, and he said Saakashvili's statement that 2007 would be a "crucial" year for the resolution of the conflicts left Russia with the need to "prepare for eventualities."

¶9. (C) CBMs AND THE GEORGIAN PRESENCE IN UKV. Discussion turned to a non-paper on CBMs tabled by the Germans. (A copy of the final version of the paper was sent by email to Department and Embassy Tbilisi on January 22.) While the paper speaks for itself, the discussion of certain specific measures yielded some insights. On the issue of joint CIS PKF/UNOMIG patrols, Arnault said UNOMIG planned to reestablish a permanent presence in the UKV village of Azhara. He called for a proportionate Georgian law enforcement presence to ensure the GoG's ability to provide security and services to the approximately two thousand UKV residents.

¶10. (C) RUSSIA ON CONDITIONS FOR GEORGIAN PRESENCE IN UKV. Chernov said the letter of the 1994 Moscow Agreement was vague but that its spirit provided that the Kodori Valley should not become a "hotbed for renewed confrontation." He said looking simply at the uniforms of the Georgians deployed in the UKV was "not enough" and noted that UNSCR 1716 - the most recent UNOMIG mandate renewal - mentioned the need to follow the Moscow Agreement and "other relevant documents." The UK and German representatives pressed to know what those documents might be. Chernov, unable to dodge the question, admitted that in his "modest experience," he did not know of any. Nonetheless, he said withdrawal of heavy weaponry by Georgia was also not sufficient and that Georgia should not be permitted to stockpile spare parts, gas, or oil in the UKV. Nor should Georgia be permitted to build infrastructure projects like a bridge built for heavy vehicles, he said.

¶11. (C) AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE ON GEORGIAN UKV PRESENCE. Bryza said the U.S. would raise Chernov's points about uniforms and stockpiling with the GoG. He said Georgia needed to change its approach to the "Government in Exile" but noted that it appeared that all of the Friends agreed in principle that Georgia has the right to administer to residents of the UKV. Arnault insisted that Georgia had an obligation to provide armed forces of some sort in the UKV in order to protect both the CIS PKF and UNOMIG observers. He asked Chernov for a Russian position on acceptable Georgian troop levels in the UKV. Fall supported Arnault's request. Notably, Chernov did not push back.

¶12. (C) CALIBRATING THE UNOMIG PRESENCE. Arnault noted that UNOMIG would request six more international civilian police to reach the UNSC-mandated level of twenty officers. Chernov said Russia has told Abkhaz leaders to continue cooperating with the UN civilian police, noting that the crime rate had decreased recently. Arnault said UNOMIG would try to expand along the ceasefire line, given renewed potential for skirmishes. He planned to establish a forward base in lower Gali to which human rights officers and others might eventually be attached. He also planned to request the UN to increase the number of military observers to its maximum authorized strength of 134, and possibly to ask for authorization for another 15-20 military observers.

¶13. (C) INTERNATIONAL POLICE FORCE. On the possibility for introduction of an international police force beyond the UNOMIG police advisors into the security zone, Chernov

said it would not be helpful. He said the Abkhaz would prefer continued assistance by UN advisors. Bryza said the goal was for Abkhaz and Georgian police to work together but that Georgians needed to see an improvement in the security situation in Gali and Zugdidi to restore their confidence. Arnault noted that Gali residents do not feel safe now and that UN training and equipment would not be enough to restore their sense of security. Arnault said the judiciary was a real problem, as most of those arrested in Gali are "recirculated" back into the population.

¶14. (C) INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS. During a discussion of potential assistance for developing the Sukhumi port, Chernov said the Abkhaz were "split at the top" on the issue but that they saw a potential infringement on their authority over the port. He said the Abkhaz might consider an international presence at the port in return for certain unspecified benefits. Bryza said Tbilisi was also concerned about relinquishing customs authority over a port on Georgian territory but that the Georgians recognized the advantages of opening up Abkhazia to the outside world.

¶15. (C) MOVING FORWARD. Over lunch, Arnault launched a discussion about strategies to send the parties back to the negotiating table instead of relying on the international community to move the conflict resolution process forward via a Kosovo-driven "recognition debate." Bryza agreed that the sides need to move toward "real confidence-building" and said he would send that message strongly to the Georgians. Arnault emphasized the role of the FSG should be to urge the sides to negotiate and help them implement what they agree upon. Bryza proposed institutionalizing a series of intermediate meetings to take place between Geneva meetings, mandate renewals, or both. Arnault suggested a mid-March meeting at which the SRSG would evaluate progress on the ground since Geneva. Fall suggested that a statement by UNSYG Ban Ki-moon, read by Arnault, could encourage the FSG to produce a roadmap and keep pressure on both sides.

¶16. (C) SHAMBA VISA. Chernov suggested an intermediate meeting might be useful if Shamba were to appear before the UN in New York. Arnault agreed it would be a good idea for Shamba to visit New York to report on real progress achieved after Geneva, but he argued for another venue besides the UNSC. Fall said an Arria-format meeting could be agreeable as long as it was not held in conjunction with negotiations for a UNOMIG mandate renewal. He said the FSG needed to indicate full support for a UNOMIG mandate renewal before considering such a meeting. Arnault argued against an Arria-format meeting and suggested an "open meeting" sponsored by an NGO as the venue for Abkhaz and Georgians to report on their progress. The French delegation underscored the importance of timing and the need to avoid having a meeting too close to the UNOMIG mandate renewal negotiations. Fall disliked the idea of an NGO-hosted meeting.

¶17. (C) UNOMIG RENEWAL. Lucas said "we can do much better (on a UNOMIG renewal) this time" and suggested enshrining the CBMs from the German non-paper in a streamlined, forward-looking UNSC resolution. Arnault suggested the FSG agree on a streamlined UNSCR by mid-March that would avoid political issues and laundry lists of tasks for the sides. He said the sides look to the UNSCRs as landmarks and that the mandate renewal should be used as a tool by the FSG to focus the sides on important issues. The French asked about lengthening mandates to more than six months and said the renewal process must not be interrupted by arguments over "negative substance." Chernov said there is "no doubt that the role of UNOMIG is important" and advocated a regular renewal process in order to "keep the issue high on the UN agenda." Bryza said it was clear that all of the Friends wanted UNOMIG to be renewed but that a process

was needed for "real discussion" of substantive issues, perhaps a series of meetings led by U/SYG Guehenno. Fall suggested New York meetings at the Deputy PermRep level at which the Georgians and the Abkhaz could brief the FSG. The Friends agreed to consider two or three meetings per year - either in Geneva or New York - to take place in advance of UNOMIG mandate renewal discussions. These additional meetings would be designed to delink the mandate renewal from substantive negotiations between the sides.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: Chernov was a pleasant surprise thanks to his readiness to push the discussion further rather than simply playing defense like his predecessor, Amb. Bocharnikov. Chernov seemed focused on reducing tensions on the ground in order to foster momentum in the conflict resolution process. The overall dynamics of the FSG Berlin meeting were positive and collaborative, leaving much to be discussed on February 12-13 in Geneva. END COMMENT.
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